

Francis Fukuyama

The Great Disruption

The Free Press 1999

Over the past half century, economically advanced countries have made the shift into what has been called an "information society", or "information age" or the "postindustrial era". This shift has been labeled by futurist Alvin Toffler as the "Third Wave", suggesting it will be as important as the two previous waves in human history, from hunter gather to agricultural, and from agricultural to industrial. Economically, services increasingly displace manufacturing as a source of wealth, and rapid communications by tv, radio, fax and email erodes geographical and cultural boundaries. Fukuyama states that a society built around information tends to produce both freedom and equality, both of which are of value in a modern democracy, and political and corporate hierarchies come under pressure.

The age of deindustrialization of society, from roughly the mid 1960s to early 1990s, has seen a serious increase in crime and social disorder, as well as loss of confidence in traditional institutions. Mutual social ties also tended to be less permanent, less engaged, and involve smaller groups of people. Fukuyama sees in these changes a "Great Disruption". In the social values of the industrial age. A "moral" decline is measurable in statistics on crime, fatherless children, reduced educational opportunities, broken trust.

The hypothesis of Fukuyama's book is that these negative social trends, which together reflected weakening social bonds and common values holding people together in Western societies, is intimately connected to the transition from an industrial to an informational era. He considers part of this a culture of intensive individualism spilled over into the realm of social norms, where it corroded virtually all forms of authority, and weakened the bonds holding families, neighborhoods, and nations together. Fukuyama sees a bright side: social order, once disrupted, tends to be re-established, because human beings are by nature social creatures, whose most basic drives lead them to create moral rules that bind themselves together in communities. The idea that social order has to come from a centralized bureaucratic hierarchy was associated with the industrial age. He argues that there are signs today that the Great Disruption of the 1960s to the 1990s is beginning to recede. [as of 1999] crime is down sharply in the US and other countries [look at corporate crime!]; divorce rates fallen; levels of trust in major institutions have improved during the 90s. anecdotal evidence that more conservative social norms have made a comeback, and the more extreme forms of individualism of the 70s has fallen out of favor [what about the extremism of the individuals in the elite class ?!!]